



ADJC TODAY

The mission of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections is to enhance public protection by changing the delinquent thinking and behaviors of juvenile offenders committed to the Department.

JANET NAPOLITANO, GOVERNOR

DAVID A. GASPAR, DIRECTOR

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Challenges Lead To Improvements Throughout ADJC



The past year has been challenging for the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC). The tragedies of three youth suicides have sharpened our focus on ensuring an environment that supports the continued development of our behavioral health services. This is necessary both for youth undergoing programs in secure care, and for those who have moved into the community portion of their treatment.

A comprehensive review has been done of all Department operations. Every effort is being made to identify risks of suicidal ideation and to guide the work of addressing those needs. All staffing ratios have been reviewed and many will be modified. Housing unit staffing is being changed. Each housing unit will have a manager along with the clinical positions that are necessary to strengthen our efforts with delinquent youth.

An article in this newsletter details some of the training components that are being implemented for new and existing staff who have contact with youth. My expectation is that completion of this training will be a high priority for all affected staff.

In addition, a review of our physical plant has been conducted and a number of program modifications are underway. These include the implementation of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), a program that was demonstrated as effective in reducing suicidal ideation in the state of Washington. Additional changes are being implemented in Community Corrections to ensure that youth with mental health needs are receiving an appropriate level of attention, and work continues on a Comprehensive Classification System that will greatly improve our ability to provide an appropriate level of care to youth.

These changes are just a part of an effort that will greatly improve the delivery of services to youth and families and will greatly enhance our ability to serve taxpayers by developing safer communities. É

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ADJC Implements Suicide-Prevention Measures

The Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC) has established new procedures requiring all employees who have direct contact with youth to attend an eight-hour training session on Suicide-Prevention.

A similar eight-hour training component has been added to the Training Academy curriculum for new employees of the Department. These classes were developed to increase awareness and understanding of the factors that have contributed to increasing incidents of suicidal ideation among ADJC youth.

ADJC has been forced to cope with the tragedy of three separate suicides in its secure facilities over the past year. These occurred during a time when the state's overall rate of juvenile suicide incidents has been on the rise.

A national report indicates that 50 to 75 percent of incarcerated youth nationwide are estimated to have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

In Arizona, there has been a 300 percent increase in suicide for children under 15 years of age. The statewide juvenile suicide rate is one of the highest in the nation. The rate for youth under age 15 increased faster than it did for older teens. From 1990 to 2000, state records show that 88 Arizona youth under the age of 15 took their own lives. Most of them were between the ages of 10 and 14.

This rate surged in 1998 with the deaths of 12 children according to an Oct. 19, 2002 article in *The Arizona Republic*. A December 2000 report by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice titled, *Handle with Care: Serving the Mental Health Needs of Young Offenders*, stated that 50 to 75 percent of incarcerated youth nationwide are estimated to have a diagnosable mental health disorder.

Suicide risk among ADJC youth increases when juveniles have a history of one or more of the following:

- Substance Abuse;
- Mental Illness;
- Severe Family Problems.

Youth who are sent to ADJC with a substance abuse history often lack the appropriate experience that is needed to handle their feelings. They enter a secure facility where they may become sober for the first time in years and are often facing reality for the first time while learning new ways to cope with stress and problem solving.

To address this need, ADJC sought advice from a number of national consultants and brought together some of the Department's most experienced subject-matter experts in suicide prevention. They include: Dr. Traci Wherry, M.D., the Department's Director of Mental Health Division; Leticia Amick, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist for Adobe Mountain; Frances Gonzales, the Mental Health Treatment Coordinator for Black Canyon; and Joyce Morgan of Tucson Parole, a veteran counselor with extensive experience in identifying and treating youth at risk for suicide.

This full day of training is being facilitated by more than 30 qualified Mental Health professionals for ADJC currently working within the Department's secure facilities and in community corrections. All of them have completed train-the-trainer classes in connection with this topic.

Several adult learning methodologies and small-group activities are used throughout the training. Some specific small group activities are assisting staff to identify youth with suicidal thoughts. These include the following:

- How youth are different from adults.
- How youth in secure care or on parole are different from other youth.

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- Behaviors that may indicate youth suicidal ideation.
 - Personal problems that may increase a youth's risk for suicide.
 - Signs of severe depression and other mental disorders.
 - Guidelines for working with youth with mental disorders.
 - The importance of accurate and timely documentation.
 - Communication Bridges and Barriers.
 - Understanding youth with cultural, racial, or language differences.
 - Policy and procedure interpretation for my area.

ADJC also rewrote existing policies and procedures to make it clear that all staff who have direct contact with youth must undergo suicide-prevention training, are required to wear suicide-prevention fanny packs, and are required to understand all Departmental rules concerning suicide-prevention. É

Effort Launched To Form An ADJC Alumni Organization

A new effort is being started that will allow successful youth to help other young people follow in their footsteps.

The Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC) is studying the concept of an Alumni Association that will bring together youth who have earned an absolute discharge from parole. These youth would be asked to determine how they can pass on the lessons they learned that helped them change their behavior and find a pathway to a successful, productive life.

"These are youth who have collected a lot of wisdom," said Steve Meissner, Public Information Officer for ADJC and co-chair of a work team that is seeking to set up the group. "They have learned how to avoid a return to delinquent behavior, and they have found ways to be happy, productive members of their communities. We hope they can pass on some of those lessons to youth who are still looking to change their lives."

The Alumni Association work group is reviewing a number of considerations to determine whether such a group can be established within existing state laws and ADJC rules. Among the considerations are rules regarding contact between ADJC staff and youth who are no longer under Department jurisdiction, and how to allow such youth to have contact with juveniles who are still part of the ADJC system.

The group is also exploring potential ways to encourage participation in an alumni organization, and how much coordination can be provided by ADJC employees. Participation would be voluntary. Youth who agree to be part of this effort would be asked to attend a series of meetings to discuss the goals of an Alumni Association, and to seek their opinions on the best way to work with youth and provide them with help in finding a pathway to success.

A group of ADJC employees will be formed to contact youth who earned an absolute discharge to ask for their participation. Anyone who is interested in participating in this effort should contact Steve Meissner at (602) 542-4303. É

Successful ADJC youth will pass on the lessons they learned that helped them change their behavior and find a pathway to a productive life.

MIS Update

by Susan Lucero, Information Technology Specialist, Management Information Systems

In order to better assist the staff and juveniles of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC), the Management Information Systems (MIS) Division is constantly enhancing its services. Following are a few recent examples: There is a new GroupWise. The e-mail system has been upgraded to 6.5. This enhancement has many new features including a new look; MIS is phasing out of the Windows 98 and replacing it with Windows XP. This will allow faster, more efficient computers; and, MIS has a survey available on the Intranet which allows you to provide MIS feedback on the services you are receiving. É

Dedicated Citizens Turn Vandalism Into Restorative Justice Opportunity

Steve Heckemeyer and Lana LaPointe could have gotten mad in November 1999 when they came home to find more than \$100,000 in vandalism damage.

They could have sought vengeance when two juveniles were caught and brought into Pinal County Juvenile Court, and they might have pressed for harsh punishment when the two youth were sent to the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC). They chose instead to recognize that, while the two juveniles had to face up to the pain they caused, they were troubled youth who needed education, treatment, and an opportunity to change their delinquent behavior.

Both youth completed secure care programs at the Eagle Point secure facility, went through individual and family therapy, are doing well in school and are making payments toward their court-ordered restitution. One of them is taking honors classed at his high school, while the other is working toward a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and doing well in an auto body repair program.

They are demonstrating this progress in large measure because of Mr. Heckemeyer and Ms. LaPointe, who have embraced the concept of Restorative Justice. Instead of seeking simple retribution, they are encouraging the youthful offenders to change their behavior. As a result, Mr. Heckemeyer and Ms. LaPointe are being honored with a *VoluntHero* Award from the Volunteer Center of Maricopa County.

Nancy Molever, ADJC's Victims' Rights Specialist in the Office of Restorative Justice, nominated them in recognition of the way they became advocates for change instead of victims of a crime. It wasn't easy. The vandalism was one of the worst ever reported in Pinal County.

The key to Restorative Justice was the notion that, while the two juveniles had to face up to the pain they caused, they were troubled youth who needed education, treatment, and an opportunity to change their delinquent behavior.

"I went to court expecting to see the monsters who spray-painted my walls, ripped open my upholstery, threw paint on my furniture, stole my jewelry and destroyed my belongings, including the needlepoint footstool my grandmother made me," one of the victims wrote. "All I saw were boys who needed lots of help."

The court hearings were just the beginning. The couple regularly attended ADJC Superintendent's Review and Release Boards and helped both youth face up to their behavior.

One of the youth stood up at his last board and asked Ms. LaPointe to forgive the pain and suffering he inflicted and gave her a tearful hug. The other youth apologized to Ms. LaPointe, told her how much it meant that she showed such an interest in his progress, and promised to behave better upon his return to the community.

Steve Heckemeyer and Lana LaPointe "are demonstrating an outstanding level of commitment," Ms. Molever wrote in a letter nominating them for the award. "By doing so, they have contributed to the integrity and safety of their community, possibly for generations to come." É

ADJC Today is the employee newsletter of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections. Unless noted otherwise, articles are written by Communications Division staff. For comments or input, please contact the Communications Office at (602) 542-4497. This document is available in an alternative format upon request.